

Character in Furniture





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*Character in
Furniture
Berkey and Gay
Furniture Company
Grand Rapids Mich.*



Character in Furniture



THE furniture of the ages is a book, on the pages of which are indelibly engraved not only the prevailing architecture of the peoples that have occupied the stage of the theatre of the world's family during the various periods of the drama of human existence, but the different scenes of the play, marked by the rise and fall of nations and kingdoms, changes that have made history, are faithfully portrayed.

Space will permit only of a very brief synopsis of this book, which we will open at the Renaissance chapter, a period marked by the revival of classical learning and art, having for its background the Dark Ages, which began with the fall of Rome and ended with the fall of Constantinople.

The two principal figures in this sombre time were the monk and the soldier. One was striving with all the powers of his might to keep art alive; the other with sword, torch and spear endeavored to exterminate it. As the sunshine of the Renaissance appeared the monk and the soldier began to disappear from the stage.

While the resemblance between the architecture and the furniture of historic periods is plainly discernible, the similarity that costumes bear to both might also be mentioned.

Many parallels could be drawn between Louis XIV. furniture and the gorgeous dress of that date; between the classical furniture of Napoleon's time and the severe gowns of the Empire; and the stately furniture of the Colonial period and the equally stately costumes.

The phenomena of the Renaissance should not be limited to any one department of human knowledge. The term indicates a new birth, a natural movement, not to be explained by this or that characteristic, but to be accepted as an effort of humanity, for which at length the time had come, and in the onward progress of which we still participate.

The Renaissance raised furniture-making to an art. Pupils were apprenticed to a master and studied with him until they had perfected their craft, when they opened workshops of their own. The pieces produced in



Just as the people began to turn away from the Middle Ages, the Renaissance was born. Design was made with reference to their settings, and houses possessed a harmony which had hitherto been absent. The perpetual twilight of the medieval dwelling gave place to the sunshine of the Renaissance.

This period of the world's awakening produced some of the greatest masters the world has ever known. For centuries human endeavor in the arts and sciences had been restricted, and when the barriers were removed progress and achievement knew no bounds. The genius that for centuries had been struggling for expression burst forth in a mighty flood. Beginning in Italy it spread over continental Europe, after a time reaching the New World.

The countries of the many masters of this period again a monument that becomes more imposing with the passing of the years.

There have always been those who admired and preserved the work of these great masters, but during the last half of the Eighteenth and the early part of the Nineteenth century, so many changes were taking place in the affairs of the old world, even so that the masters found very little time to devote to the preservation of their work. For the last half century, however, there has been a turning round the beautiful in furniture and decoration, and the treasures of the past are being restored and copied.

Many of the great specimens of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries stand their work as well as the printers signed their copies, and therefore they were less precious. Following this custom the Berkeley & Gay Furniture Company of Grand Rapids, Michigan, place their mark on their productions, which is an assurance to the possessor that the furniture is correct in design and of superior material and workmanship.



*The Shop
Mark*

This organization has been for more than half a century learning how to faithfully interpret the spirit of the creations of the great masters. The

old masters brought to bear upon their work and upon every part of their being. To them there was not a detail in the process of manufacture that was a trifle. First they selected their wood with the greatest care. Its kind, grain and fibre must be of such a character as to best lend itself to the finished product. The decorations and coloring of the room of which it must form a harmonious part.

To them there were no dark corners to be slighted. The invisible part of their product must be as well made as the visible. Few realize what a stupendous undertaking it is to build an organization to create furniture to meet the requirements and tastes of Twentieth Century ideals and at the same time incorporate in it the spirit and feeling of these great masters. Designers of the highest type who have made a life study of the work to be produced must be secured. The very finest woods from the markets of the world must be obtained. Last, but not least, the men in the shop must be trained, and it is a noteworthy fact that a very large percentage of the men in the shops of the Berkey & Gay Furniture Company have been with that organization since they were boys. To them their work is not merely a means by which to sustain life and give pleasure, but to create expression in their work of the high ideals and characteristic workmanship of the product of the masters, the spirit of which they so faithfully interpret.

The styles shown in this enlarged and beautified edition of *Classical Furniture*, are not only true to the periods they represent, but afford a comprehensive interpretation of the educated demand for good furniture as it exists to day.

It is possible to illustrate herein only a tiny fee of the designs that the Berkey & Gay Furniture Company produce, as the complete number comprises over 2,000 separate pieces.

For the convenience of the public, those dealers handling this furniture, have been supplied with a magnificent portfolio of photogravures, showing the entire line arranged in suites.

Further information regarding this furniture or where it may be obtained will be gladly furnished on request.





W. & A. V. 1111
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DESIGN LATE LOUIS XV

STYLES of decoration and furniture are the outgrowth of conditions. The Louis XV. style was the direct result of a definite cause. Louis XV., like his great predecessor, was only five years old when he was proclaimed king. During his minority the office of regent devolved upon the Duke of Orleans. This term of eight years, 1715-1723, was an important period in the history of decorative art.

The old court with its stately ceremonies, its pomp and magnificence was gone, and in its place was a new court, bent on the lightest and gayest amusements.

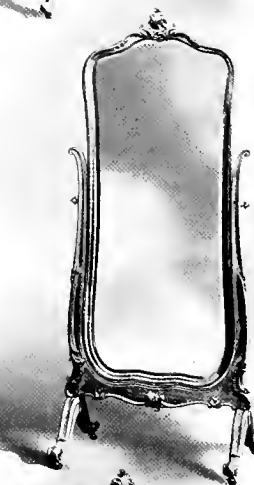
The formal arrangement of rooms, the classic treatment of walls and furniture, found little favor with the Regent and his followers. To conform to the tastes of the day, decorators of the Early Louis XV. period introduced the Rococo style. To harmonize with this idea furniture was of necessity constructed on similar lines.

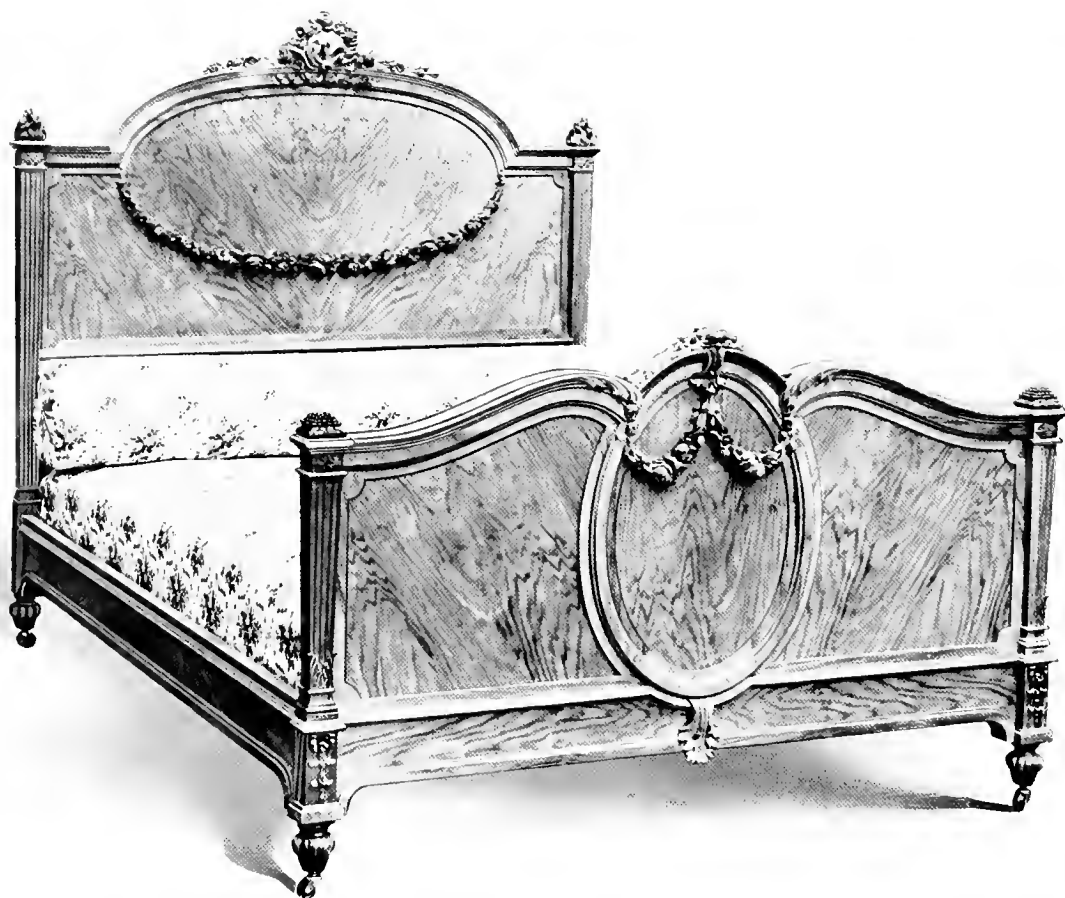
The workmanship of this furniture, which bordered on the fantastic, was of a high order, the greatest artists of the day bestowing their skill upon it.

Meissonier was the real leader of the Rococo school, which by its very extravagance brought about a reaction that was destined to transform furniture making. The design herewith illustrated represents a particular phase of the Late Louis XV. period, when curves were more subdued and the extravagances

that marked the earlier part of the period had passed. It is entirely free from the Rococo feeling which marred much of the work of the beginning of the period. The harmonious curves and carvings are thoroughly in the spirit of the best work of that time.

Space will permit of the illustration of only a few pieces of this classic design.





DESIGN LATE LOUIS XVI

MANY of the most beautiful pieces of furniture of the late Louis XVI style were made in the last years of the reign of Louis XVI, and the first years of the reign of Louis XVIII.

The style of the late Louis XVI is characterized by the simplicity and elegance of its forms, and by the absence of the excessive ornamentation of the earlier style.

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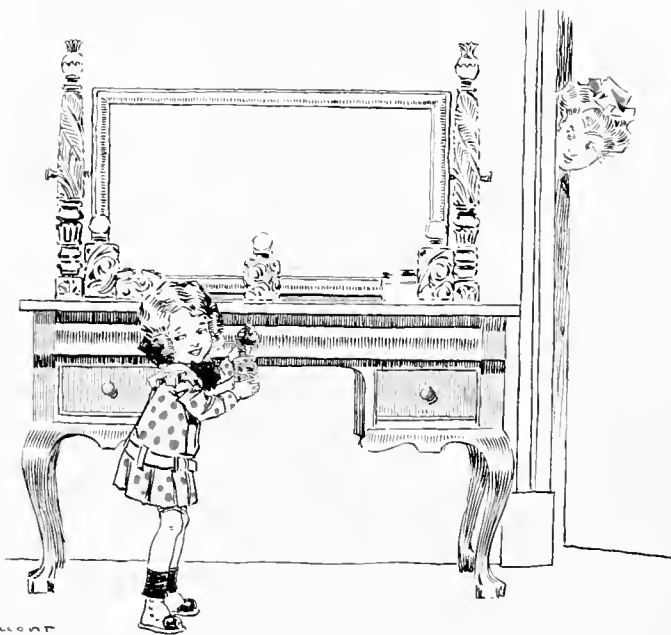
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The distinctive features of the late Louis XVI style are clearly discerned in the details of the furniture, such as the berries and the characteristic ribbon ornament.





C O L O N I A L

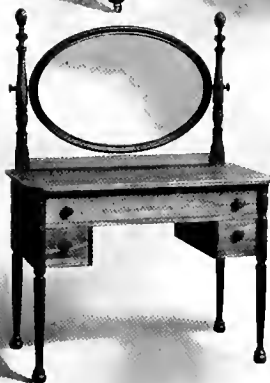
THE term "Colonial" is a much abused word as applied to furniture. Used in its true and literal sense, it includes the household effects of the Colonists from the time of the settlement of Jamestown until the War of the Revolution. This

restricted definition excludes the work of great English cabinet-makers of the late Eighteenth Century, and all pieces which owe their origin to the style known as Empire.

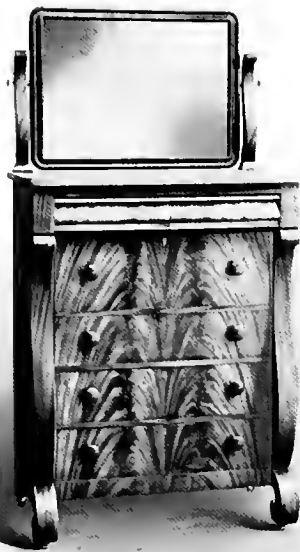
To limit the adjective "Colonial" to the furniture imported or made by the Colonists prior to 1776 would disqualify half the old mahogany made in this country.

The word has been used so long in a wider sense, and has applied so continually to everything in furniture, from the earliest possessions of the Pilgrims to the designs in vogue as late as 1820, that it is doubtful if the literal meaning is ever accepted. The broader use of the term is undoubtedly the right one.

Colonial furniture, from the first, showed a variety of types, for the early settlers, as nearly as possible, in a strange country reproduced the homes of their native land.





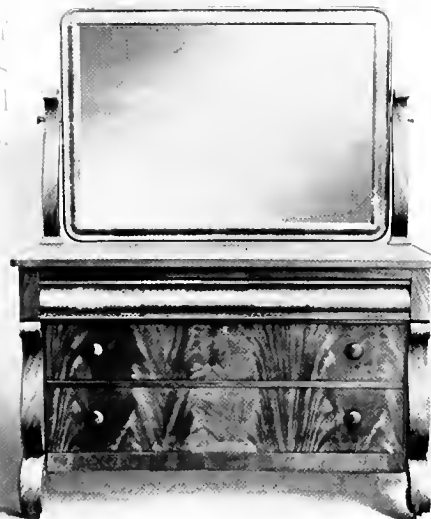
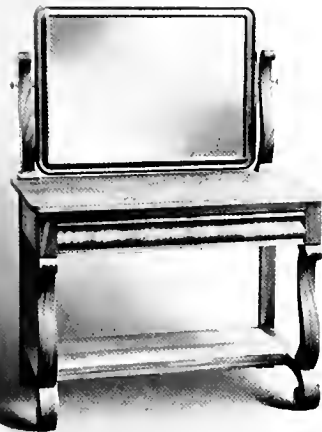


AFTER the War of 1812 English goods declined in favor, and American makers turned to France for inspiration. The American development of the Empire style is a fitting credit to the designers of this country, and bordering close to the second century of Colonial furniture making. While the Empire style in America followed in a general way the trend of the movement in France, it was free from the over-ornamentation which marred many of the foreign pieces. Carved columns, claw-feet, pineapple finials and ornamental brasses were the hall mark of the American Empire. Realistic heads of lions and griffins, and the many Egyptian details to which the French makers resorted, were happily absent from the work of the day on this side of the water. Whatever extra-

gances marked English and Continental styles, designs in this country leaned toward simplicity. It is this quality that renders Colonial furniture as satisfactory to-day as when it came from the hands of its originator.

The four-poster bed belongs to the period when this country "cut loose," just at the end of the Colonial days and in the early days of the Independence. It has the characteristic leaf and feather carving on the posts, and the chicken claw feet, and is made of wood—Mahogany.

The Sessel, or more hair, is of the Empire feeling, and belongs to the later period. It may be called the American development of the Empire style, when English patterns declined in favor, and furniture makers turned to France for ideas.





SHERATON FURNITURE

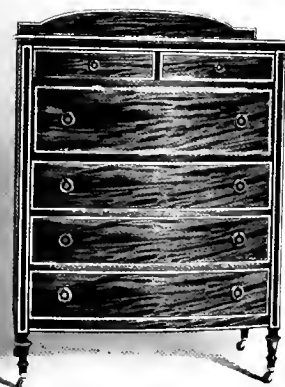
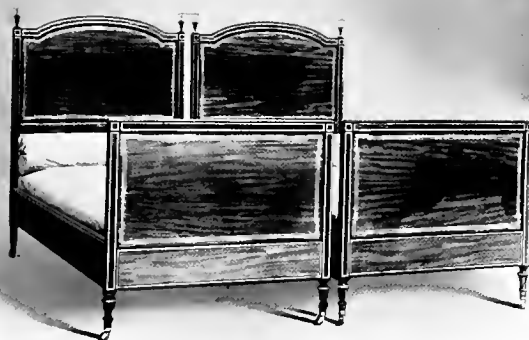
THE work of Thomas Sheraton is the most popular of any of the great English designers. Born in 1751, he was in his early manhood when the days of Chippendale and the Adams Brothers were almost over. Naturally he learned much from these great masters. He was too great to imitate yet he was generous enough to attribute that distinguishing feature of simplicity in all his designs to the influence of the Adams Brothers. His creations have the imaginative quality combined with perfect proportion and rare restraint. Ornament for ornament's sake was never countenanced by him: he decorated construction but did not construct decoration.

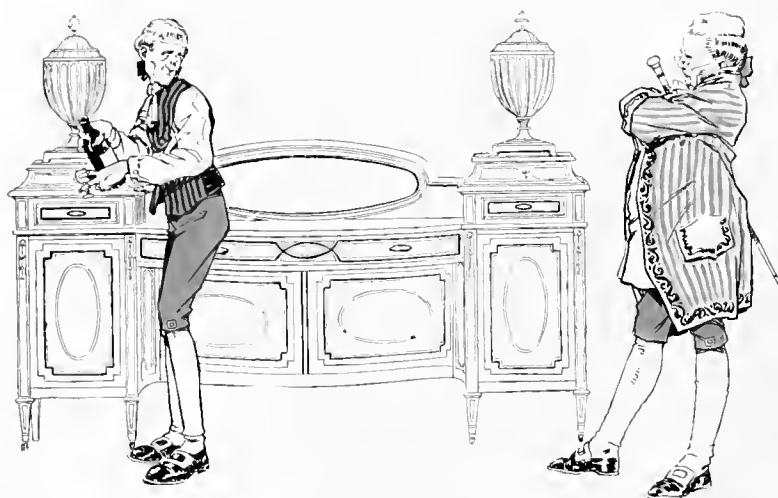
Discarding the plain tapering support so much used by his predecessors, he selected the fluted post of the time of Louis XVI, with severe lines and quiet ornament.

He made use of the fluted column in his sideboards, tables, and desks, treating it with rare restraint. In his chairs he used the square support, believing that a rectangular back demanded a rectangular base. On the same theory his use of the round and fluted leg is equally consistent, for it is always combined with a curve.

Sheraton worked largely in Mahogany, but did not confine himself to this wood. He wielded the highly colored woods as a painter does his pigments, and it is on this score that he is justly called a "color poet." His decorations consisted almost entirely of marquetry and inlay, although a lightly carved wreath was sometimes used.

Sheraton was a many-sided genius, and met the fate of the man who undertakes to do too many things well. Adam Black, to whom the world is





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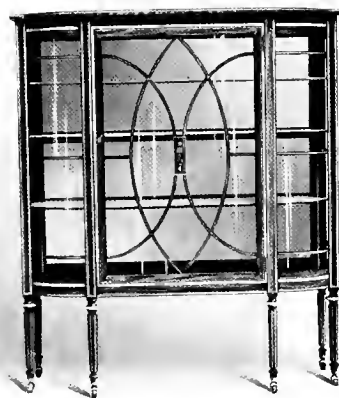
indebted for much of the knowledge of Sheraton's private life to a friend of him: "He lives on a poor street in London, his house half decayed and dwelling. He is a man of talent—a scholar, writes well, and draws more masterly. We may be ready to ask how comes it to pass that a man with such abilities is in such a state. I believe his abilities and resources are his ruin for by attempting to do everything, he does nothing."

Commenting on the above, another English writer says, "Would that most people's nothings might prove so much."

Certain it is that it was no small accomplishment to be able to give to the world a furniture style so enduring that one hundred years after his death its popularity is still in the ascendancy.

It is true that Sheraton was a dreamer, but in his dreams he saw the perfection toward which he was constantly striving. He was an inspired artist. His untiring and hopeful labors in trying to make real the dreams give to the world one of the most beautiful styles of furniture ever designed.

The dining-room and bedroom furniture shown here are examples of Sheraton furniture. They are made of the finest quality of carefully selected Mexican Mahogany, have an elegant and simple design and are ornamented with fine inlaid satinwood lines.





Reine
Vincent
10

FLANDERS FURNITURE

IN the present revival of the Seventeenth Century styles in furniture, two interesting factors may be noted: the opportunity to study at first hand a neglected period in design and the wider range and variety presented to the prospective buyer. A few years ago it was almost impossible to find furniture of Seventeenth Century pattern. The few pieces were expensive antiques, little suited to an American home. When furniture-makers turned their attention to this interesting period a rich and attractive field was presented for the first time to the general public.

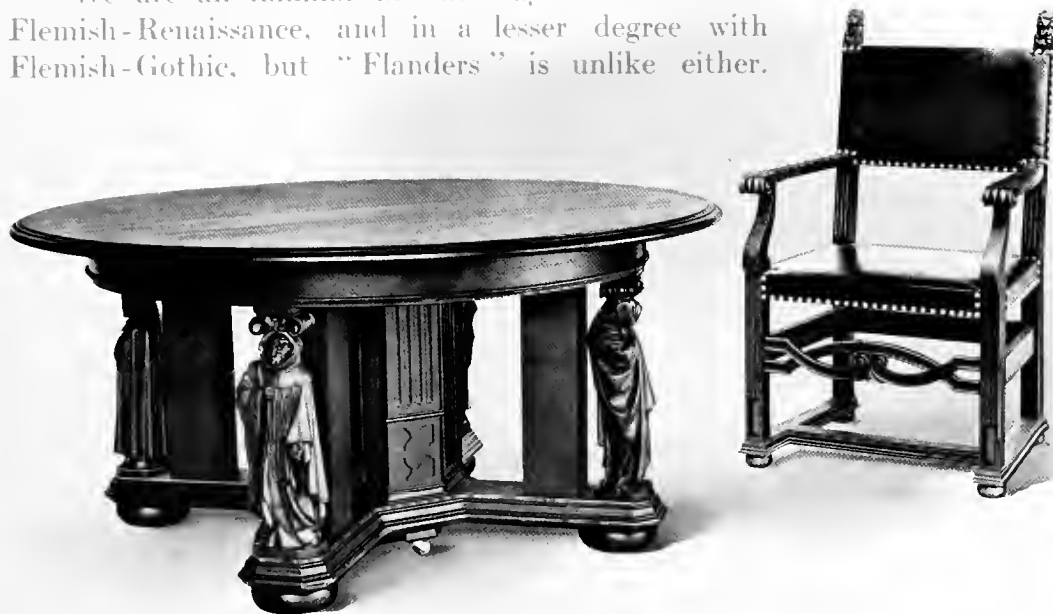
"Flanders" is the trade name chosen by the Berkey & Gay Furniture Company to designate a style which they have adapted with marked success, using the strong, sturdy characteristics of the late Sixteenth and early Seventeenth Centuries.

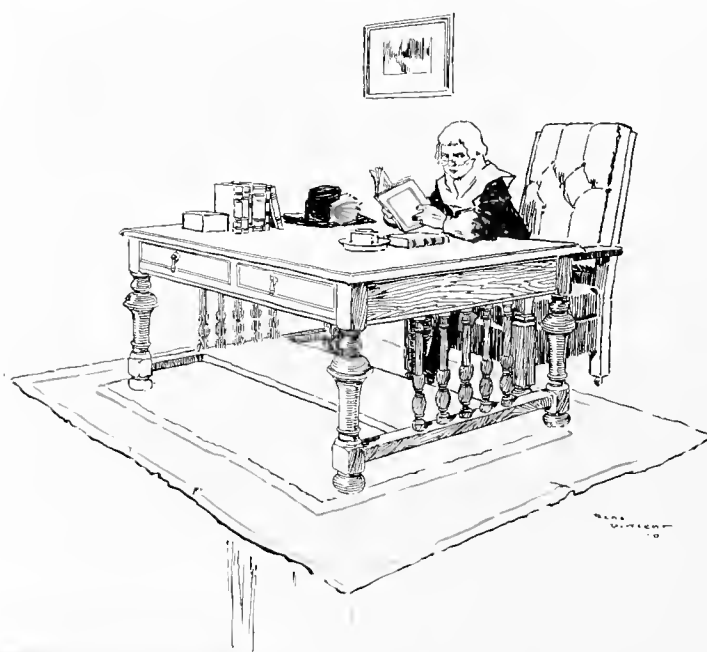
The style "Flanders," originated in a province of that name composed of a part of Holland, Belgium and northern France. It was made at the close of the Sixteenth and first half of the Seventeenth Centuries.

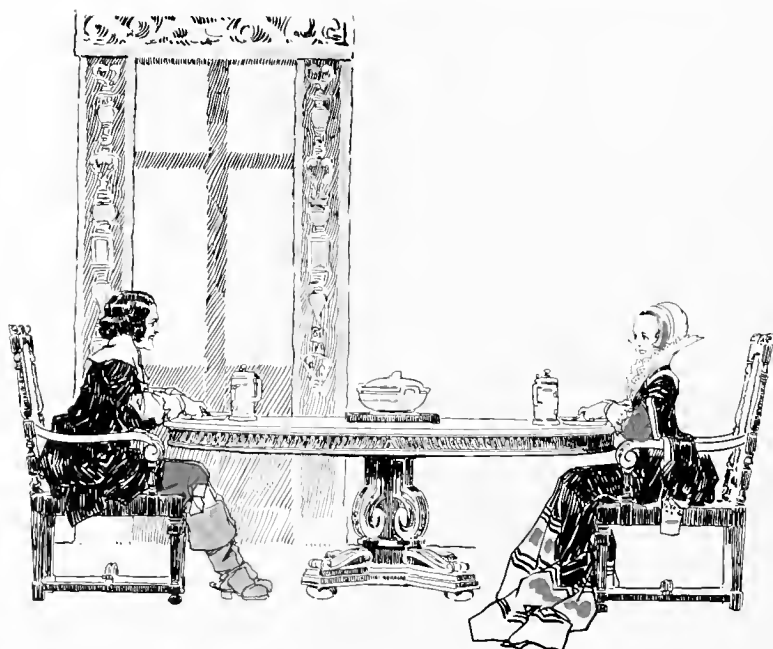
The best designer of woodwork of that period was Vreedman de Vriese, the greatest painter Peter Paul Rubens and the most active centre of production Antwerp.

After a short period of imitation of Italian woodwork, made principally of walnut, they devised from their own native oak a style so appropriate to this material, that it was borrowed under various names by the surrounding nations using such wood.

We are all familiar in one way or other with Flemish-Renaissance, and in a lesser degree with Flemish-Gothic, but "Flanders" is unlike either.







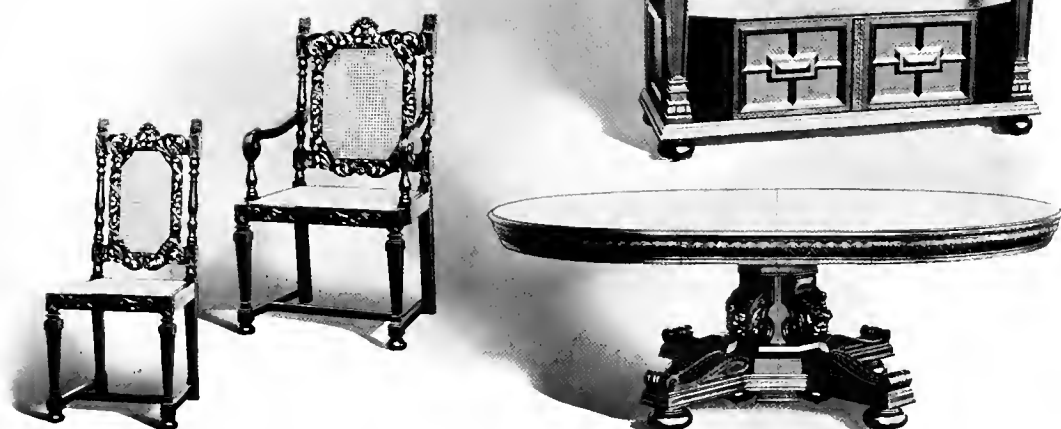
FLEMISH RENAISSANCE



IN Flanders and Holland, after a brief period of assimilation, the Renaissance developed on original lines. Wood carvers adapted the arabesque and the cartouche to a simpler, sturdier form of ornament than was known in France and Italy.

Heads and grotesque masks were introduced into cabinet work, but always with marked effect. The Dutch excelled in marquetry and the Flemings in the use of cane, both phases of work exerting a powerful influence on the furniture making of other countries. During the early Sixteenth Century the Germans combined Renaissance details with Gothic construction.

Later a more consistent type was established in which fine metal work was conspicuous. The dining-room suite herewith illustrated represents the work of the Renaissance as interpreted in the Low countries during the Sixteenth Century. So far it is the most logical style for woodwork that has ever been devised. There are no curves and the grain of the wood is not cut. It has not the extravagant carvings of the Italian school, although it looks very solid and stable and fully as rich.





CHIPPENDALE FURNITURE

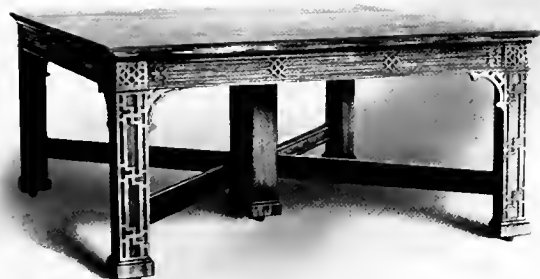


THE fame of any of the great furniture designers rests on their representative work, not on their creations en masse. Nor is it so much a question of the invention of a style, as whose individuality was strong enough to perpetuate it.

Thomas Chippendale stamped his personality on the furniture making of England in the middle of the Eighteenth Century in a manner that won him lasting fame.

He was the first Englishman to give title to a style. Celebrated designers had preceded him, but their identity is submerged in that of their sovereign. Originality was not a strong point with Chippendale. He was an adapter rather than a creator of design. His more solid chairs and settees with cabriole legs and claw and ball foot, and divided splat back were taken from the Dutch, and the same back with straight square heavy legs from the Gothic style. His most beautiful creations, with backs ornamented with exquisitely carved ribbons and lovers' knots and the carved cabriole leg, were from the French, while a later chair with straight leg and a back with a sort of interlaced strap work was from the Chinese.

The Suite shown is an excellent example of Chinese Chippendale while the Sideboard shown in the sketch at the lower left-hand corner is a true Adam design.



ENAMELED FURNITURE

THERE has been in the more recent years an increasing demand for enameled furniture for the bedroom, undoubtedly occasioned by the fact that no other finish seems to lend itself so admirably to harmonious room decoration.

There is an air or an atmosphere about a room thus furnished that seems impossible of attainment with a different treatment.

The shades that have proven the most popular and for which there is the greatest demand are white, cream, French gray, fawn, and two-tone gray, but different variations of these colors can be secured and special shades to match certain wall decorations are frequently furnished.

The design of the furniture must of course be entirely correct else the harmony that is secured by a proper combination of colors becomes incongruous. The bed shown is an excellent example of a correct Louis XVI. style, the ornamental touches are all in keeping with the spirit of the style and will bear close comparison with those seen on old bedsteads of the period. This particular bed is in cream, the ornaments in gold leaf.

Wood or cane panels can be furnished and either are proper. Marie Antoinette forever popularized cane in the excellent use of it in the many designs attributed to her. The use of wood panels makes possible a hand decoration of flowers or conventional designs to correspond with those used on wall or draperies.

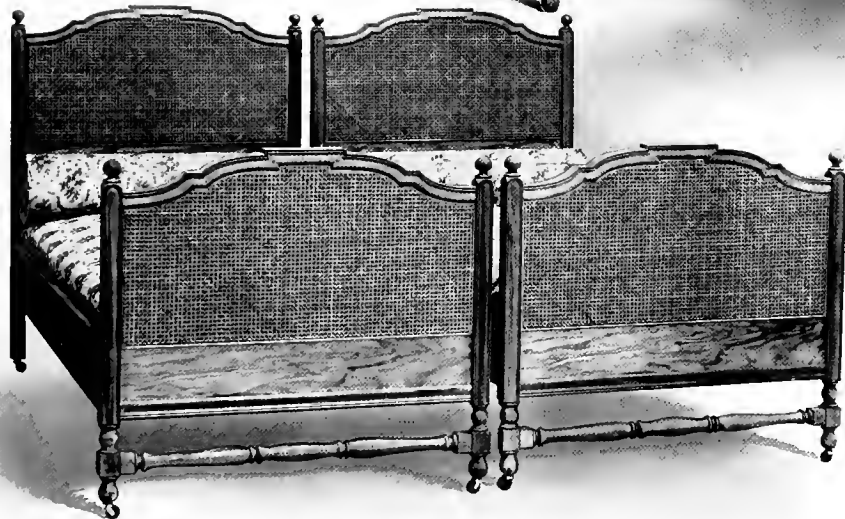


WILLIAM AND MARY

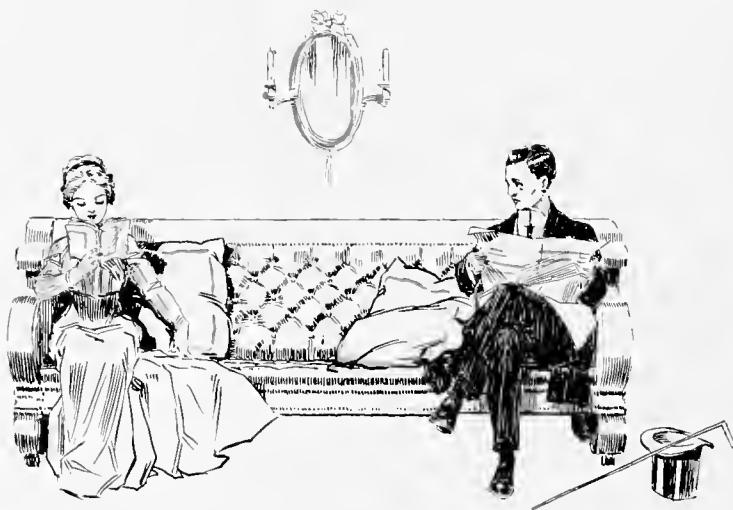
ONE of the interesting periods brought to light by the present renaissance of Seventeenth Century styles is the William and Mary. It occupies a unique position among English designs.

With the accession of William, 1688, Dutch artisans flocked to England, and the intermingling of designs worked many changes in the handicraft of that country. The tendency during the later years of Charles' reign and during the brief reign of his successor, James I., was toward lighter, more graceful furniture designing. The French influence is emphasized here because it was strengthened during William's reign by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Many Huguenot refugees of the artisan class flocked to England where they readily obtained employment. Thus it is that the furniture of the William and Mary period seems to us a composite style, blending and merging the best of late Seventeenth Century designing. These characteristics are shown in the pieces illustrated.

It will be seen that the fundamental motifs of Seventeenth Century designing are present—the



under-bracing, turned uprights, and other characteristics of this vigorous, straight-forward period in design.



RENE
VIGENT
18

FURNITURE *for the* LIBRARY



place for the spirits of the great masters, and the welcome guests that are entertained therein.

Environment plays a large part in the entertainment of these guests. A spirit of harmony and good cheer should emanate from furnishing and decoration.

The pieces of character illustrated herewith, in every line of which is engraven the ideals of the great master artisans of the past, make fit companion pieces and are indispensable to the proper and harmonious fitting of the library.

THE library is the social as well as the study-room of the home, a place where friends of the living are entertained and communion is had with those that live in books, and art creations in furnishing and decoration. The ideal library should breathe forth an atmosphere of welcome and quiet refinement in order to be a fit





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